[Neal S. Watts]

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Beliefs and customs - [Occuptional?] lore

Gauthier, Sheldon F.

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist. #7

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FEC

Neal S. Watts, 78, living at 110 1/2 E. 2nd St., Fort Worth, Tex., was born on his father's farm in Shelby co., Tex., Aug. 20, 1859. His father, William Watts, immigrated to Texas from Tenn., in 1841. He chose [Shelby co.?] as his future home, due to the Tennessee Settlement at that time existing there. He had learned the shoemaking craft which he followed for a livelihood. Eff Daggett, a neighbor of his, moved from Shelby co. to Tarrant co. about 1867, and wrote him letters describing Tarrant co. and its advantages. The descriptions give appealed to him, so he moved to Tarrant co. in 1868. The Watts family located where the town of Mansfield is now situated. William Watts negotiated for a tract of land, on which he built a home. He cultivated a small tract and raised cattle. He died in 1869. Neal Watts started working the year following his father's death. his first job was planting corn, dropping the seed by hand, and received 25¢ per acre for his labor. At the age of 13 he secured employment on the cattle ranch of [?]. H. Stevens, located 15 miles W. of Mansfield. He worked on this ranch for three years, then started a cattle business of his own. After quitting the cattle business, he engaged in farming for several years, then retired. His story: C-12 - 2/11/41 - Texas

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“I am nearing 79 years of age. I was born Aug. 20, 1859, on the farm of my father, whose name was William Watts. The farm was located in Shelby co., Tex.

“My father came to Texas in 1841, from Tenn., and located in Shelby county because there was a settlement of Tennessee folks there, which was called the Tennessee Settlement'.

“What I refer to as a farm in Shelby county was a tract of land consisting of about 10 acres cleared for cultivation. On this tract we raised the vegetables, wheat and corn we needed for our feed supply, also a few acres of cotton lint for making cloth. We usually had some extra cotton, besides our home needs, which 2 was sold.

“My father was a shoemaker and depended on his shoe craft to provide the needed cash money. Most of my father's time was occupied making shoes for families of the settlement. The 10 acres did not require a great amount of labor to attend the crop raising. Before the Civil War, father owned a couple of slaves who did the farm work, which enabled him to devote his full time to his shoe business.

“When father arrived in Shelby county, there were not many people living there. I am repeating what father told me. Even what I became old enough to recollect, the country was thinly settled. The people settled there were clustered in little settlements.

“The conditions we lived under, when I was a child, was vastly different from what it is today, but we were secured against want of food or clothing.

“The woods contained a large amount of wild game of various kinds, and the beast and fowl, which were edible, could easily be hunted or trapped. Figuratively speaking, a person walked over wild game while passing through the timber. I have often watched wild turkeys drinking water out of our cattle's watering trough, located near the barn and about 100 feet from our house. [?] thought in those days that the wild game would never become

exhausted. Also, besides the wild game, the woods contained hundreds of cattle and hogs which bred and raised themselves in the regions adjacent to the settlements.

“The cultivated fields were fenced with split rails, to 3 protect the crops from the cattle, hogs and wild beast.

“Everybody had more or less cattle. Some made cattle raising their principal business, some raised cattle as a side line, and some did not give cattle any attention except when they wanted beef to eat. However, even if a settler did not have a critter, there were many animals without a brand, and a supply of beef could be secured by spending a little time hunting for an unbranded yearling. If a person did not want to spend the time hunting for an unbranded yearling, there was no objection to him taking a branded animal for eating purposes.

“The hogs were raised as the cattle were, except for a little corn feed given to them once in a while, to keep the animals in the woods adjacent to the farm. The hogs lived on the various nuts and vegetation of the woods, which we referred to as ['mass?']. The cattle were provided with salt licks only, which were placed near their waterholes, and the licks held the cattle in its vicinity.

“With cattle, hogs and wild game everywhere in the woods, we had a variety of meat to choose from to satisfy our meat appetite. Our wheat supplied the necessary flour, and the corn the meal and feed for animals. these articles were taken to the grist mill where the grain was ground. The miller retained a portion of the flour and meal in payment of his grinding charge. Our garden provided our vegetables. In the woods we could find plenty of honey, stored by the wold honey bees. Also, wild berries and wild fruit of several varieties. With this supply of food there was not any chance to go hungry. 4 “The cotton, and a few sheep, supplied the material out of which our clothing was made. Therefore, we were secured against want by products from the land and woods.

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“Father's money made from his shoe making business was clear profit, which when added to some money derived from the sale of a little cotton, enable father to save some money.

“Among the people for whom he made shoes was Eff Daggett, and the two men were close friends. Daggett was among the men in Shelby county who made cattle raising their special business. He owned several hundred head and foresaw great possibilities in the cattle business. He was not wholly satisfied with the Shelby county territory for carrying out his plans. He finally decided to move to Tarrant county, and did so in 1867.

“After locating in Tarrant county, Daggett developed a large cattle ranch. He ranged cattle over all the region North from the city of Fort Worth to what is now [Rhome?], a territory extending about 25 miles.

“Daggett wrote father frequently, giving information about Tarrant county, and the letters created a desire with father to move to Tarrant county, which he did in 1868. [He?] settled in the southeast part of the county at the present location of Mansfield.

“Father negotiated for a tract of land, which was cleared and broke and on which he raised our food supply, devoting the major part of his time to developing a cattle ranch. Father died in 1869, at the time he was just getting started in the cattle business. This castrophe caused me to hunt work.

“I did odd jobs which I was able to secure, working first for 5 one and then another. My first job was planting corn by hand and I received 25¢ per acre for the work. The land was marked off in rows and I would step about two feet, punch a hole with the heal of my boot, drop two kernels and then kick dirt with the toe of my boot to cover the seed. The field I planted was about 10 acres and I was engaged a week doing the planting. However, the $2.50 was excellent wages for a 10 year old land those days.

“I did some work for Mann and Fields, who operated a grist mill on [elter's?] Creek. The town of Mansfield takes its name from these two men. The mill was built about a year

before we came to the region. After the mill was built a community began to develop. A store and blacksmith shop were the first to be located, then gradually others and finally a postoffice was located there. I have a vivid mental picture of the first church building, because it was built of logs, the work being done by the men of the community with my assistance. There was not a nail used in the structure. All timbers were fastened in place with wooden pegs. Nails cost money and the nails were donated, consequently we used our labor to make wooden pegs and saved spending money for nails.

“When the store, blacksmith shop, postoffice and church were established the place became a community center.

“The entire section was a cattle range, with a few patches of fenced land on which a little wheat, corn and cotton were raised.

“The largest cattle ranch in the section was the 'LHS” ranch, owned by L.H. Stevens. He bought several [?] thousand acres of land in the region for 25¢ per acre. His ranch headquarters was located near the village. 6 “When I was 13 years old I was hired by Stevens to work on his ranch at a wage of $15.00 per month.

“I could ride a hoss and throw a rope, which were about the first things a boy learned to do those days., but I was no bronc buster.

“There was one job a boy could attend to just as well as a man. This job was riding the range looking for sick, injured and bogged cattle. On Stevens' range there were a few low places where the cattle would mire following a period of wet weather. the injuries were almost entirely from brush or horn cuts which were followed by screw worm infection. Occasionally an animal would develop bloat, which resulted from food fermentation producing gas. I was put to work riding over the range looking for distressed cattle.

“I would leave camp in the morning with a morsel of food in my saddlebags and ride among the cattle scrutinizing the herd. I carried a salve compound with which I daubed

the cuts to kill the worms, or to prevent an infection when I discovered a cut on a critter. To perform the work it was necessary to loop and throw the animal. Then, with the hoss holding a taut rope, one must leave the saddle quickly to reach the animal immediately after hitting the ground. There is a few seconds following the fall when the critter will lie still, and during this time the daubing took place. That the animal would fall with the out side up, the rider approached the animal from the same side. [?] the loop around the animal's neck when the jerk took place, the critter's 7 head is pulled towards to hoss and its body swings to the opposite direction and falls on the side away from the hoss. In the event the animal fell contrary to the usual way, we let it up and again set out to perform the task.

“When a bloated critter was located, it was always in too much distress to get up and run or fight. I carried a long bladed knife for the purpose of treating bloated stock. We stuck the knife in the animal's side puncturing its paunch, thus allowing the gas to escape. The puncture was made in the low spot just to the front of the hip bone.

“The mired cattle were hauled out of the mire by the hoss pulling by means of the saddle. With the lasso tied to the [pommel?] and the loop placed around the critter's horns the hoss dragged the critter out.

“There were times when I was kept busy and other periods when I did nothing particularly, except to ride.

“Stevens bought many cattle from the small ranchers, and when his herd reached a low number he would begin to buy and gather cattle.

“There was an average of seven hands employed. At times there were as many as 15 waddies working.

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“We lived in a bunk house when not working too far off from headquarters. During the Spring and Fall roundups, the crew always lived out doors. Each of the roundups kept the boys out 8 about three months, and then the chuck wagon was their home.

“All the ranchers in the region took part in the roundup. Then all the strays were separated, the calves branded and the cattle counted. As the roundup proceeded from one section to another, more or less strays belonging to different sections would be encountered. Each rancher had some waddies, called 'reps', in the roundup crew who looked after their ranch's cattle

“The cattle would stray off of their home range during storms, or when the grazing became scarce.. Otherwise, the cattle would stay within the vicinity of their own range. The herd would graze far away, at times perhaps several miles, but towards late evening they would start drifting towards their bedding ground. They bedded near the waterhole and salt licks.

“While the weather was fair and grazing sufficient the herd didn't need any watching to keep it from drifting, but when a storm came the crew were compelled to ride in order to hold the herd. The more inclement the weather, the harder it was to hold the animals.

“There always was danger of a stampede while a storm was in progress, especially when it was thundering and lightning. When a stampede took place, sometimes the herd could be stopped and at times more or less of the cattle would get away. If a bunch of cattle strayed, we would be compelled to spend some time hunting them. Perhaps a number of the strays could not be located, but those would turn up during the roundups.

“In the Mansfield region there was considerable woods and 9 hills which provided shelter for the cattle. Therefore, the cattle would not do much drifting during ordinary storms. The animals would go to a wooded spot or into a ravine at the [?] side of a hill. The hailstorm was what we dreaded. When a hailstorm began to pelt the critters, they became wild and woods or ravines would not satisfy them as a shelter. In addition to the cattle becoming

wild from fear and pain, the hosses became unmanagable. It is then next to impossible to do a thing but wait till the storm subsides, then start to hunt the scattered herd.

“While I was on the Stevens' ranch we experienced one stampede during which we were helpless, and that was caused by a hailstorm. The stones were large and the cattle went wild. The hosses started to pitching whenever a rider started in any direction except with the storm, so we just had to let the cattle go where they pleased.

“The 10 gallon hats saved us waddies by protecting our heads and shoulders, but the rest of our bodies suffered bruises. The pain we suffered from the hail made us feel that the cattle should not be blamed for the way they were running. We hunted cattle for several days after this storm and found some [50?] miles away. We were short about a third of the cattle until the roundup and then located nearly all the strays.

“During my stay on the Stevens' ranch I rode the range and did not take part in the roundups. My only change of work was taking part in one drive of a herd to Kansas City.

“Stevens did considerable herd driving to the Northern market and besides selling his own cattle he bought many cattle to make 10 up driving herds of 5,000 to 3,500 head.

“The driving crew numbered 14 men which included the cooky and the hoss wrangler. The cooky drove the chuck wagon team besides attending to the chuck wagon and doing the cooking. The hoss wrangler was in charge of the remuda, which contained about 30 hosses. The hosses trailed with the chuck wagon which usually went on ahead of the cattle to the next camping place.

“The extra hosses were needed for changing mounts, because a hoss could not stand the traveling it was compelled to do at times, consecutive days. While the herd is grazing leisurely and moving up the trail, some of the hosses are traveling forward and back here and there. Then when the cattle became fretful or went to running the hosses were put to hard riding. therefore, to insure sufficient mounts, extra hosses were taken on the drive.

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“The trail boss generally rode ahead of the herd selecting the route, deciding on the camping places for the nights and the bedding ground for cattle. While there existed a well established general route, the route was not followed exactly. The herd was shifted right and left to give the animals plenty of grazing.

“Riders rode at different points at each side of the herd and at the rear. The animals were allowed to graze at their leisure, but always headed up the trail, except when we desired to reach some specific place at a certain time. Then the riders would bunch the herd in a compact body and urge the herd forward.

“Watering places were the thing which governed the speed of our travel. It was essential to reach water for the cattle twice a 11 day, if possible, but there were sections of the country where once a day was as often as we could reach water, and longer periods in a few locations.

“Before dusk, the cattle would start to bed and by dark, as a rule, the entire herd would be bedded down. In ordinary clement weather four night riders kept watch over the herd. The night riding was done by groups of four working in four hour shifts. During the 70's there were many depredaters, such as cattle rustlers and Indians in some sections along the trail's route, and it was necessary to guard against the depredations. the depredaters would stampede the cattle to produce strays which they would pick up. On the trip I made we experienced no rustler trouble, but Stevens had such trouble on previous trips.

“While we drifted through the Indian Territory, Indians contacted us and asked for beef. They would be satisfied with one or two critters, and we gave them sore-footed animals. There were always more or less animals developing sore feet, which could not complete the trip and would have to be dropped eventually, so we were not out anything by giving the Indians such animals.

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“The stampede was another thing we were compelled to keep on the watch for. Because the cattle were away from their home range, they were more liable to take fright and go on a run. While the drive I was with had no stampede that resulted in a serious loss of cattle, yet there were a large number of runs.

“We drove the cattle through Fort Worth and crossed the Trinity River about a mile northeast of where the courthouse is now located. 12 At this point was the best place for fording the river with the cattle. Our route out of Fort Worth was northwest to Wilbarger county, to what was called Doan's Crossing on the Red River. At Doan's Crossing we forded the Red River. From this crossing we drove northward to Kansas City.

“We forded many streams. Some were crossed easily, while others presented more or less difficulties. Our troubles forded streams were due to high water which we occasionally encountered following rains. By the time we arrived in the Indian Territory and farther west, the cattle had learned to take the water readily, but when the water was high it was also running swiftly. With a swift running stream the tendency of the cattle is to drift down the stream with the current. Under such a condition, it was necessary for the riders to swim their hosses at the lower side of the herd and, by waving slickers or the curled lassos, force the cattle to swim against the current enough to remain in a straight course. At times the riders were unable to accomplish their purpose, and cattle would reach the opposite bank scattered down the shore. Perhaps some of the cattle would get into hogs of quicksand, and then we would have a time pulling the critters out.

“After we arrived at the end of our drive and the cattle were disposed of, we relaxed for three days before commencing our return trip. There were plenty of amusement places of various kinds and the boys enjoyed themselves according to their taste. Some of the boys felt worse after three days of the rest period than when they began the relaxation, but all felt they had a good time.

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“A short time after I returned from the Kansas city drive, 13 I spent six months buying cattle for Stevens from the small ranchers. I saw a chance to go into the cattle business for myself and did do so.

“An uncle of mine owned considerable land near Mansfield and I leased 1,000 acres from him, which I fenced. The lease cost me the fencing. Then I rode through the country buying any critter from a weaned calf up to a year old, but nothing over a year in age. In my pasture was an abundance of grass and an excellent supply of water. those young cattle I placed in the pasture and forget about the animals, except to watch the fence and ride over the pasture occasionally to see how the cattle were progressing. There was no feed bill or much of a wage bill. I would pasture the cattle for six or mine months and then sell, if I received a satisfactory price. The natural growth of the cattle [netted?] me a good profit. I continued this business for several years.

“My fence was built of boards and rails, and the cost of the fence put me to hustling for money. Just about the time I had my fence under way and was wondering where I could get some money to complete the job, the [P. & P.?] railroad built into Fort Worth, which was in 1876.

“The track building had reached where Arlington is now and the builders were pressed for time to complete the road into Fort Worth on a specific date so that they could received a bonus. The contractors needed all the workers they could possibly crowd on the job. I went to work for Hughes, a team contractor, and drove 14 a team of mules pulling a scraper. I started to work then the grading work was going on at about where the west edge of Arlington is now, and continued until the track was laid to the depot of Fort Worth. At the time, the depot was located on a tract of land south of (now) [Lancaster?] Ave. and east of Main St.

“I don't suppose there has been another piece of track laid which will compare with the original [T. & P.?] tract from Arlington to Fort Worth.

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“I worked cutting down high spots and filling the low places. For a high spot to received attention it had to be an abrubt rise and the low places received the same attention. What we actually did was to level the ground so that each end of the ties would be on a level. When we came to a creek, which required a bridge, instead of building a trestle we placed a crib of ties on which the track was laid. When we reached the ground near where the depot was located, there a duck pond was encountered, which had been used by the farmer owner raising geese and ducks. It would require some time to fill the pond, therefore the track was laid curving around the pond and back to the depot.

“Towards the last week or so, men and teams worked till exhausted, then would rest a short time and return to the job. Just so fast as a way was provided for laying ties and rails, they were laid.

“There was some provision in the Legislature's grant which set out that the road must be completed on or before the Legislature adjourned. The Legislature's time to adjourn was three or four 15 weeks prior to the time the road was completed into Fort Worth, but by some parliamentary maneuver the friends of Forth Worth were preventing adjournment. It was by a close margin that the Legislature was held in session. Each day rumors went the rounds to the effect that Fort Worth would lose the Legislature battle, followed by a contrary report. Such rumors continued up to the day the track was laid to the depot.

“The day the first train came into town, which was the final act in winning the race against time, was a day of celebration in Fort Worth for everybody. People came into Fort Worth for miles around, some driving hosses or mules hitched to buggies or wagons, some driving ox teams hitched to carts or wagons, and many on hossback. The largest contingency was cowboys riding mustangs. Many of the visitors had not seen a railway train before and I was one of them, except for the work train which hauled material on the laid track behind us workers.

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“The people began to gather early in the morning of July 19th, 1876, which was the day the first train ran over the new road. Folks were craning their necks looking east down the track for the train which was soon to arrive. After considerable waiting, smoke of the engine was soon in the distance, then a shout from the crowd rendered the air. Then the train appeared, wibbling and wabbling, with a slow movement over the track. At times it appeared the train would never reach the depot, because the way it swayed a tip seemed certain.

“The train finally reached the depot blowing its whistle, then 16 steam began to pop suddenly. The popping of steam scared many of the assembled people and there was a scurrying to get away. The scared folks seen realized that the engine was not going to burst and they returned to inspect the locomotive. There were many speeches made [entelling?] the future of Fort Worth; and, with whistles blowing and bells ringing, the hilarity continued till [night?].

“I completed my pasture fence and made good profit out of my cattle business because, after the railroad entered Fort Worth, our market improved and it was easier to sell stock.

“I bought and pastured cattle for about 10 years. By this time settlers were moving into the section in great numbers, which increased the price of land. My uncle desired to sell tracts from the land which I had leased. I bought 100 acres from him and started my farming career.

“other ranchers, who continued in the ranching business, began to move their herds West, and then ranching gradually ceased in the Mansfield region.

“I shall relate on more custom of the early days, which was followed while I was a child.

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“Matches were scarce and expensive. The old sulphur match cost 10¢ a box and the boxes were not much, if any, larger than this penny box of today. therefore, we used matches sparingly and a few were kept for emergency use.

“The flint and steel were used to light a piece of punk or tender for starting fires. Also, we would set fire to a tree stump, which would burn slowly for several days. When we wanted to start a 17 fire, we would knock off a piece of the burning wood and carry it to the fireplace.